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ABSTRACT

Since a high percentage of Native American students who begin college do not graduate, a summer survival program was created to assist Native American students in developing their scholastic abilities. The data establishing the need for such a program were provided by a study that compared the performance of all Native Americans enrolled in freshman composition with a group of randomly selected students from the general population. Analysis of the results revealed a need for a survival program. Features of the program include room and board on campus for two months under supervision of counselors, a small stipend for spending money, participation in workshops, and tutoring throughout the remainder of their years in college. (DF)

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Native Americans in Freshman Composition:

Some Observations

by Gerald Gallant

NOTE:

The first seven Roman numbered pages of this text were in the form of a handout for the teachers in the audience. They are a necessary reference for understanding various points in the discussion: charts, graphs, etc. When I refer to the "handout," I refer to these pages.

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The Five Questions of the Correctness Study

1. Do Native Americans fail freshman composition at a greater percentage than the general population?
2. If so, is it because they begin with more mechanical errors in English to overcome?
3. Is a large percentage of the errors they make ESL type errors?
4. What is the distribution of their error?
5. What kind of Program should be proposed to improve the situation?

An Example of "Special" Errors

> One Saturday morning we decided to go camping at Pecos. . . . We went there because we volunteer for cleaning the camp ground. . . . After we got there we unpacked our camping equipments. . . . The air was fresh and clean. We waited around for the people who represent to clean the paths, and whatever is around the camping ground to be fixed. All the people gathered around to start to help. My friend and I like camping so we help, too. After we work for three hours we rest. In about one hour we went fishing. We cought six fish. We went back to the tent to fried the fish for lunch.

This sample was abridged from the student paper which had the largest proportion of "special," or ESL type, errors. It is not at all intended to be typical, but illustrative of how a large proportion of such errors give a paper an "other language sound."

Formulas And Scores

$\frac{\text{Number Of Words Written}}{\text{Sum Of Weighted Errors}}$ Example $\frac{228}{65}$ = 3.51 Correctness Score

$\frac{\text{Weighted Special Errors (ESL type)}}{\text{General Weighted Errors}}$ Example $\frac{30}{90}$ = 33% Of Special Errors

	NA Averages	GP Averages
K	11.06	16.22
A	11.90	10.10
G	11.04	18.10
M	13.21	15.71
	11.80	15.05

15.05 GP Average
- 11.80 NA Average
3.25 GP-NA Difference

15.05 GP Average
+11.80 NA Average
2 ⟌ 26.85
= 13.43 Composite Average

$\frac{3.25}{13.43}$ = .24 Difference Between The Groups

NA Percent Of Special Error	GP Percent Of Special Error
24.06	11.85

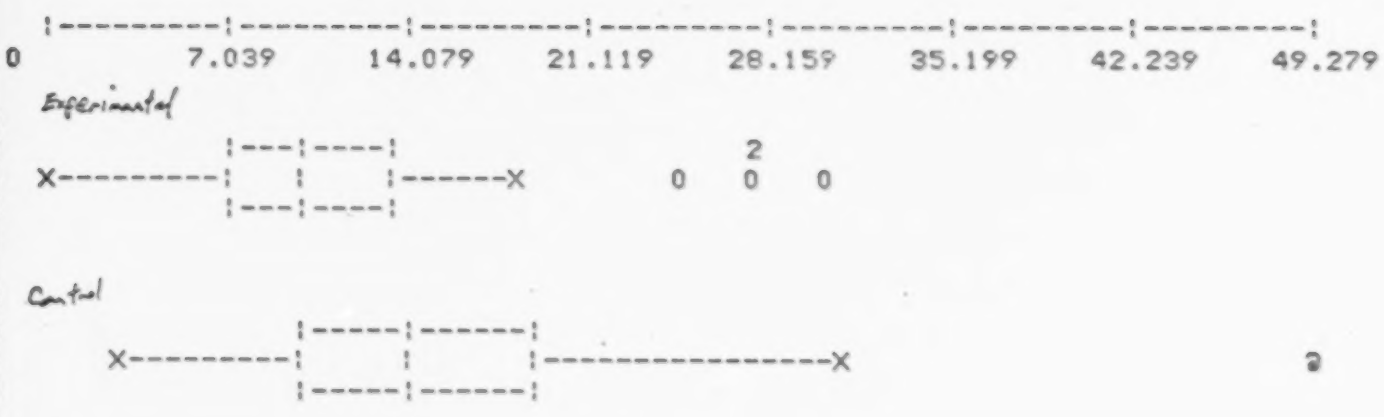

Figure 2. Schematic Diagram for the Correctness Score Data.

IV

Experimental Group

```
0*|000000000000
 .|7789
1*|002
 .|555788
2*|034
 .|79
3*|001222344
 .|55678
4*|001
 .|67
5*|0
 .|7
6*|
 .|
7*|44
 .|
8*|0
 .|
```

Control Group

```
0*|00000000000000000003
 .|56788999
1*|0012334
 .|5578
2*|0111134
 .|5679
3*|23
 .|
4*|0
 .|
5*|3
 .|
```

Figure 3. Stem and Leaf Plots for the Proportions of Errors Data.

Summer Enrichment Workshops

Readiness To Succeed

Orientation: Resources as resources--not threats. (lectures, discussions, trips)

a. The University World: familiar sites and pathways (buildings, classrooms, offices, recreation)
b. Procedures in departments and programs.
c. Supportive social and academic groups.
d. Albuquerque--business trips and outings (parks, movies, libraries, shopping, housing, etc.)

Image Building and Career Identification

a. Visits from Indian role models, both student and professional
b. Visits from Indian professional clubs and programs
c. Visits from representatives from industry

Language and Skills

ESL: Written and oral practice of of verb forms, inflections, prepositions, articles, etc.

Discussions of differences between students' first languages and English--exploration of problems

Learning from experience: Drawing on topics and experiences from the "Readiness" workshops for paragraph and paper topics
Drawing on other past experience
Developing categories from concrete things
Developing topics from concrete examples.

Learning by doing: Group writing--shared concepts, vocabulary, amplification.
To group and individual revision
To brainstorming, rough outline,

d. Talks with career planning representatives from the university

Consciousness Raising

(discussions and role playing)

a. Cultural conflicts (assimilation, identity, peers)

b. Personal conflicts (money, loneliness, self-confidence, etc.)

Assertiveness

a. Self-management (time and money)

b. Dealing with frustration

c. Positive paths between timidity and anger

d. Successful transactions

and simple, formal paper.

Skills: Reading paragraphs for central idea and vocabulary building

Note taking, test taking, time mangement, etc.

Writing for special purposes

Here the idea is limited to success in English 100.

A brief preview of the requirements, and the main concepts taught.

What is a five paragraph essay?

What is a fragment?

What is a comma splice?

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What I'm going to do in the next thirty minutes is take you along on a personal Odyssey, from my complete ignorance of there being any Native Americans in my classes, through my mistaken notion that whatever their number they were universally failing, through an experiment we did in English 100 at UNM to get a clearer view of the situation, and, finally, through a proposal we wrote in Native American Student Services, to try to improve retention. I hope you find it interesting and we can share some ideas.

Before coming to UNM, I had only one experience with a Native American in freshman composition, and it was strange. I had given an assignment for the students to write a description of their favorite place, and he had written on the beauties of the Rosebud Reservation. I called him in for a conference to discuss what seemed to be a very promising paper. It was his second paper, and both of them were good. I told him that the writing in both of his papers was well organized, concrete and spare--a bit too spare--but that if he added a little more detail to his paragraphs, he was probably headed towards an A in the course. I never saw him after that day, and I was bewildered. I tried to contact him, but couldn't. I heard he was still in college for a while, but dropped out before the end of the semester.

To the extent that I thought about it then, I vacillated between two wrong reactions. The first was silly and trivial. What is a native American, I thought? A kid you offer an A for a little bit of work, and who immediately disappears. The second reaction was one of guilt. What did I do to contribute to this outcome?

Probably nothing, or very little.

For example, I didn't know then, that a Native American doesn't necessarily have the same concupiscent appetite for As that many of us Anglos do. As though they were legal tender.

I didn't realize then, that a youngster fresh off the reservation, bright as he was, might be suffering monetary and social problems, loneliness, whatever.

I didn't know then, that he might be experiencing cultural conflicts about assimilation, or just the opposite, feeling that he didn't belong at all.

Or that he might be questioning the value of this college degree in tribal life.

And the list goes on...

In short, I had no special knowledge about Native Americans. I was certainly not alone in this. A word of justification. Composition teachers aren't social psychologists, or universal specialists. If we were, we would have to give equal time to Blacks, Chicanos and a host of others. We have neither the time nor the skills for such a commitment. The administration admonishes us to stick to composition, and with some of our workloads we have our hands full. Finally, it's a rare bird, and maybe not a good one, who enters his classroom and immediately begins to classify his students into ethnic groups.

Most of us discover special students during the process of teaching, especially if the problem is resistant to the curriculum. It was in this way, at UNM, that I began to notice students with curious errors that were flunking their papers. They were not comma splices or fragments, the endless misspellings, or even the usual type of noun-verb agreement errors, though the students made these errors as well. What was extra and different

were errors similar to those of foreign students. Having been a specialist in fundamental adult education and ESL before I received my advanced degrees, I said, Aha! these kids are speaking Spanish in the home. Sometimes I was right; more often I was wrong. They were speaking a variety of Native American languages.

As a concerned teacher, knowing these students would not pass this course because it did not teach them what they needed, I began to refer various students to university resources. In a couple of severe cases, I sent letters accompanied by student papers to the English as a Second Language Program. These were rejected as inappropriate, primarily, I believe, because they had a mixture of ESL and literacy problems, and probably also because that program is already overburdened and underfinanced. It was just an emergency expedient on my part. I felt then and continue to feel, that in any longterm, full scale endeavor, it would be inappropriate to place our oldest and most legitimate Americans in a program for visiting foreign students or novice citizens. It was simply a matter of finding a service that could address the second language problem.

The other resource I used was the skills center, a committed tutoring service on the campus, which in some cases helped. But the majority of such students, it seems to me, considered extra help, during the first semester, during the welter of remedial courses, just another part of the confusing burden, and attended sporadically, if at all. I later decided that an optimal program would not begin <u>in medias res</u>, when the students were already failing. The feeling of failure breeds more failure. Perhaps there would be no reason for failure. But this came later. At this point I was beside myself. It seemed to me that every Native American I noticed was in trouble with English, probably failing. And I helplessly bent many a

colleague's ear on the unfairness of the system. As time went on, I came to realize that most were passing, some doing well, but the problem at the lower end did not disappear.

It now was clear, that if I wanted to do anything to help these students I would have to move beyond impressionism to some scientific answers to the questions on your sheet.

1. Do Native Americans actually fail freshman composition at a greater percentage than the general population?

2. If so, is it because they begin with more general errors to overcome?

3. Is a large percentage of the errors they make ESL type errors?

4. What is the distribution of their error? Are a few making all of it? Are all making some? Is it a combination? These are very important questions to answer, to know precisely which students need help--how much they need, and what kind they need.

5. What kind of program should be proposed to improve the situation?

At the time when I had derived these questions, an event occurred which would give me more experience working with Native Americans and at the same time a way of carrying out the study already in mind. Lucille Stilwell, Director of Native American Student Services at UNM, who was aware of my interest, hired me to create a Summer Survival Program, on a grant from New Mexico State University. Under the aegis of this grant, I would make some

small contribution to retention, and I would also be in position later to identify Native Americans for the study, which the English Department is prevented to do by the Privacy Act.

For the Survival Program we followed a simple procedure. We contacted all registered Native Americans with GPAs of less than 2.0, students in academic trouble, and later the teachers in the classes they were taking. With some difficulty, we put together a group of eight students, mostly from referrals, approximately 18% of the target group, whom we tutored individually and tracked over the summer. If there was any question of ability, it was answered by the fact that seven out of eight of these students passed their courses, some of them going up from Ds to Bs. The one student I gave up on, the most timid student, a girl with an English ACT of 6, whom I tried on several occasions to teach abstraction, that is to write topic sentences, was an interesting lesson in motivation. I was sure, as timid as she was and as weak academically, she would surely drop out. She took English 100 for the third time last fall and finally passed it. She is still in school.

I either acquired or reinforced several ideas from this experience. First, I learned that Native Americans run the whole gamut of personality types, just as they run the gamut of ability, but on balance, in this situation, often a failing situation, most tend to be timid, some tend to be hostile, and some vacillate between these extremes. There is a clear need for successful assertiveness. Second, I reinforced my opinion that help should appropriately begin at the beginning, when we could depend on the help of indigenous authorities, the families, the tribes, the high schools. Why wait until students were failing, and most had dropped out? Why write blindly to reservation addresses, for students anonymously on campus? Why

have emergency programs, when the continued tracking of an enrichment program obviates the need? Finally, the central nature of English was clear; all of the students, including the best one who was going pre-med, were having trouble exploiting the language.

This brings us back to our freshman composition study and our five unanswered questions on your sheets. To find these answers we identified two groups of students. Our experimental group consisted of all Native Americans in English 100 at UNM. This is the remedial composition class where seventy five percent of all Native Americans begin their composition sequence. The control group consisted of fifty-five general population students--an equal number--randomly drawn from the same classes as the Native Americans.

At the end of the semester, by comparing their grades, we were able to answer question one. Using all failing grades, for which the student repeats the course, Ds, Fs, and WFs, 14 Native Americans flunked, compared to 7 for the general population, exactly twice as many. Eliminating the Fs, which teachers rarely give except in punitive circumstances, and counting only Ds, which, for both groups, correlated almost perfectly with low diagnostic scores, 11 Native Americans failed compared to three for the general population, almost four times as many. By either count, the results are significant.

The second question--did they have more error to overcome--required a more involved procedure. For this, we made a comparison of the freshman diagnostic essay, which is given to all students in English 100, when they enter the class. The test is simply an essay response to a choice of one out of three general experience questions. After the classroom teachers had graded these papers, we requested those from the students in our two groups

and regraded them according to a numerical system, a modified version of one published by Brodky and Young in TESOL Quarterly, June 1981.

This system produces a correctness score, by dividing the number of words a student writes, by a count of his weighted errors. This weighting consists simply of putting a 1, 2, or 3 value on the intensity of each error--regardless of type--depending on the amount it disrupts the discourse. Thus, there can be a 1, 2, or 3 spelling error, a 1, 2, 3 comma splice, a 1, 2, or 3 omission, and so on. A 1 is a minor error, a 3 is severe. The larger the student's error count, divided into the number of words he wrote, the lower his correctness score.

The grading team consisted of myself, Mike Hogan, the chairman of freshman composition, and two advanced teaching assistants with professional experience in both composition and TESOL. We each received an equal number of Native American and General population papers, with names appropriately masked. Each of us graded the papers by the system I described, and computed the scores for each student. The results on are the second page of your papers.

At the top of the paper is the formula for the correctness scores, and below it the formula for the percentage of special errors. The two columns below that are the results I spoke of. For example, grader K had an 11.06 average for all the Native Americans in her group, against a 16.22 average for the general population students in her group. It can be seen, going down the Native American averages on the left, that there was little variation--a good consistency--among the Averages for Native Americans among the four graders. Among the general population averages, only one, 10.10 for grader A, seemed out of line with the other grades. To check out for idiosyncracy, we had her papers regraded by another grader, whose grades

came out similar. We consequently decided that the difference was by chance distribution, a weak general population group, which might also be a compensation for an over-high grade on any other group. We added the averages and divided them by four, and below the lines we have the average for all the Native Americans tested on the left, and for all the general population students on the right--11.80 to 15.05.

To the left, below we have the difference between these two, and to the right we have these two averages together, divided by two, or the average for all students tested. Finally, the difference over this average, yields a 24% difference between the two groups. In short, the Native Americans entered freshman composition with 24% more error of any kind than the general population students.

Below these scores are the percentages of special error, or ESL type errors. To get these scores, we went back to our score sheets, which had the weighted errors separated and noted in eighteen categories. From these we took the error counts from the following categories which we considered to be most characteristic of second language errors--verb forms (tense, inflection, agreement), word forms (other than mere spelling), unidiomatic use of articles or prepositions, and all omissions which seem to show and an uncertainty of standard American English Idiom. We added these special error counts for each student, put them into the second formula noted on your sheet and thus got the percentage of special. Below to the left is the average for all Native American students, over twice as much as that of the general population of the right--24.06 to 11.85.

We don't need higher mathematics to see that if we could bring this percentage of NA special errors closer to that of the general population, we would significantly raise their correctness scores.

So the answer to the first three questions is yes. There was greater failure in our Native American group, more initial error to overcome, and a greater proportion of "special errors." We submitted our data for statistical analysis, and the results were significant. There were numerous graphs, for which we only have time for two.

On the schematic diagram for the correctness score, figure 2, Page III of your handout, the next page, we see two similar, overlapping figures, but with that of the Native American experimental group substantially lower. Each box in the middle represents 25% of the students' scores, the broken line on the ends, 25% each. The mode for the Native American group, the most frequencies at a particular grade, is between nine and ten, approximately at the middle vertical line on the upper figure. This nine to ten score is particularly critical, because all of the students who failed the course with Ds, both Native American and general population, had correctness scores of under ten. I think that score is a good diagnostic indication of students who need an enrichment program. It is true that many Native Americans with scores under ten did pass, but I strongly suspect, that with such weak skills, with English 101 and 102 to follow, and with the influence of English on other courses, a large proportion will eventually end up in our negative statistics--that is among the 72% of all Native Americans who have either flunked out or dropped out of UNM by the end of the sophomore year.

This clearly does <u>not</u> say that every Native American needs special help simply because he's a Native American. As you might have guessed, there was a strong correlation across the boards between our scores and end term grades. Nine Native Americans received Bs in the course, along with seventeen General Population students. These came from the upper end of the

graph, along with two students left out by the statisticians, as outliers, too high for the group. We see some similar positive results on the stem and leaf plots for the proportions of special, or ESL type errors, Figure 3, page IV, of your handout.

The zeros along the top of the plot represent students who made no such errors. There are 12 in the NA group. It is significant to note that six out of the nine Native American students who made Bs were from among those zeros, with another at less than ten percent. Only two had a significant percentage of such error. Among the students on this plot who made such errors, the Native American (Experimental gp[1]) mode is at around 30%, the numbers by the three (30, 30, 31, 32...). There were twenty-two Native American students at thirty and below, against only four students for the general population. This is another diagnostic indicator of students who need an enrichment program, students with 30% or more ESL type errors.

On the final sheet, you have a thumbnail sketch of the program we proposed tp improve retention. The recruitment of students and planning for this program would be done through continued contacts with familiar authorities: tribe, family, schools. There would be adequate testing, a minimum of ACT, Correctness scores, and special error proportion. Motivation would be defined by the desire to come to college, not by high ACT scores. Although all Native Americans who desired the program might be welcome, preference would be given to students <u>least likely</u> to succeed without our help. The students would receive room and board on campus for two months, under the supervision of counsellors. They could also receive a small stipend for spending money during the two summer months. During this time, they would attend the workshops outlined on your sheets, two workshops

a day, two hours each, five times a week. To follow up the program, there would be testing, tutoring and tracking, throughout the rest of college.

I will only make the briefest comments on the sketch and then we can talk. The readiness to succeed workshop on the left would be directed by a Native American social psychologist or the equivalent, with Native American student aids. The titles below the main topic aren't workshops themselves but either subject matters or methods of procedure. The top two are more surface concerns; the bottom two are deeper concerns. But regardless of depth, they are equally important.

A specialist in ESL and remedial English would direct the Language and Skills workshop, with the help of a teaching assistant. One of these two would attend the Readiness workshop each day, to integrate subject matter, but not participate. This workshop would put special emphasis on ESL problems, but would consistently integrate all of the other concerns and methods listed on the sheet.

I thank you for your patience in listening so long. I welcome your questions and comments.